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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000775

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [AMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: DIPLOMATIC EFFORT ON DAMASCUS COMMUNITY SCHOOL
FINDS "NO FLEXIBILITY" ON CLOSURE

REF: DAMASCUS 764 AND PREVIOUS (NOTAL)

Classified By: CDA Maura Connelly for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Canadian Ambassador Glenn Davidson briefed Charge on a November 4 meeting between SARG MFA Vice FM Faisal Miqdad and a group of local diplomats, led by the Dean of the Consular Corps, Argentinian Ambassador Herman Roberto Plorutti. The diplomatic group also included the Ambassadors of the Netherlands (Desiree Bonis), Germany (Andreas Reinecke), and the UK (Simon Collis) as well as the Indian DCM. Responding to an appeal from the group not to close the Damascus Community School (DCS, aka the "American" School), Miqdad said there was "no flexibility" on the part of the SARG regarding the order to close. The school must close on November 6 as the SARG had ordered. Miqdad claimed to be taken by surprise by the news that the school's administrative and teaching staff had been given until midnight November 4 to depart the country. He undertook to extend their permission to stay until midnight November 6. (Note: MFA Chief of Protocol Abdellatif Debbagh called Charge to inform her of the extension to November 6 less than an hour after the meeting. End Note)

¶3. (C) According to Davidson, all the diplomats appealed to Miqdad to think of the negative consequences of the school's closure on the diplomatic community, on Syrians, and on the families assigned to Damascus by international businesses. They disabused Miqdad of what he acknowledged to have been the SARG's assumption that there were other readily compatible educational options in Damascus for the DCS student body. The diplomats explained that the Pakistani International School of Damascus (PISOD) employed a different curriculum, was accredited through different agencies under a different system, and was limited anyway in the number of available places. Miqdad admitted that the SARG had not been aware of those issues but even so there would be no reconsideration of the order to close DCS.

¶4. (C) Davidson said that the Consular Corps Dean had agreed to arrange another meeting on an urgent basis "higher up a parallel food chain, with better access" to discuss alternative means of providing appropriate international education in English in Damascus (Comment: Davidson was speaking on an open line but Charge assumed him to be referring to Presidential Advisor Bouthaina Shabaan. End Comment.) Davidson's view was that there is no chance to reopen DCS and that efforts to "reconstitute" the school

under new sponsorship and a new Board of Directors might be difficult but worth pursuing. Concerns remain among the diplomats as to the viability of any follow-on institution, given the anticipated attrition in the student body during an interregnum of uncertain length.

¶15. (C) Comment: Miqdad's claim not to have known of the November 4 departure order betrays either disingenuousness on his part or a lack of effective communications in his office. Charge had called his chief of staff (and the chief of protocol) prior to the meeting to request an extension for the DCS staff. End Comment.